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(54) Improvements in and relating to powder coating system

(57) A powder coating system is provided comprising a powder spray booth (2) with a powder recovery system having an overspray intake (18) communicating with the interior of the booth. A diverter plate (26) may be held within the booth (2) to define with the booth floor (10), a duct leading to an overspray intake (18) of the

powder recovery system. Alternatively or additionally, the coating system may include an air assist which provides jets of air across a portion of the interior surface of the booth. The surface may be one or more sloped portions (22) of the floor. The air supply may be pulsed to produce periodic bursts of air across the interior surface.

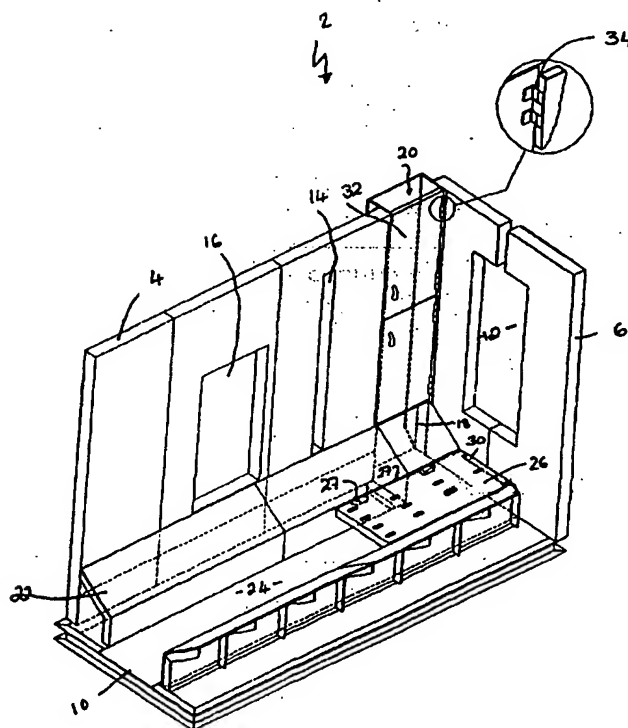


Figure 1

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Description

[0001] This invention relates to powder spray coating and, in particular, to the recovery of powder which has not adhered to the article to be coated from a powder spray booth.

[0002] The powder which does not adhere to an article to be coated in a powder spray booth is known as the "overspray". Overspray powder may miss the article to be coated, rebound from a surface of the article, or be deflected by the electrostatic fields in the spray booth away from the article.

[0003] It is known to recover overspray powder by exhausting the air from the booth and hence the air-borne overspray powder. The filter elements which have been used to recover overspray from powder spray booth are capable of removing substantially all the overspray from the spray booth exhaust air so that the powder may be reused. It is also known to use cyclone separators instead of, or in conjunction with filter elements for recovery of overspray. Cyclone separators are effective in removing the majority of the overspray from the spray booth exhaust air and are easier to clean than filters because very little powder is deposited inside the cyclone housing.

[0004] In known arrangements the cyclone separators have been connected to the powder spray booth by a duct extending from an overspray intake near the floor of the booth to the inlet of the or each cyclone. European Patent Application No. 94929600.8 discloses a powder coating system where the duct is built into the powder spray booth, with one of the side or end walls of the booth forming part of the duct.

[0005] In European Patent Application 98940476.9 there is disclosed a further development wherein the portion of the side or end wall which forms part of the duct is removable from the remainder of the wall to allow easy cleaning of the duct. That Application also discloses a system for collecting deposited overspray powder comprising a scraper bar which continuously reciprocates across the booth floor between the end walls to collect powder on the booth floor and move the collected powder towards the end walls of the spray booth adjacent to each of which overspray intakes are provided.

[0006] In recent years there has been a growing desire to be able to spray multiple colours in a single booth in rapid succession. However, changing powder colour requires cleaning of the booth to remove powder deposited on the walls, ceiling and floor which was not extracted by air exhaustion. Proper cleaning of the walls and floor of the powder spray booth between colour changes is very important to ensure acceptable production quality. Such cleaning may be carried out manually by an operator using a scraping and/or compressed air jet apparatus. However booths have been proposed which are intended to automate the deposited overspray powder cleaning process including the booth of European Patent Application No. 98940476.9 referred to above

with its reciprocating scraper bar.

[0007] Whilst many developments have been made and it is now possible to clean certain booths in 15 minutes or so, there is a customer driven demand for even more rapid cleaning capability to reduce cleaning time still further. Furthermore, whilst automatic mechanical devices such as the reciprocating scraper bar of European Patent Application 98940476.9 do accelerate the cleaning process, they also increase construction cost and are vulnerable to mechanical failure.

[0008] Cleaning is preferably conducted from one end of the booth to another and so, from the point of view of cleaning, the overspray intake of the powder recovery system would ideally be located at one end of the booth. However, from the point of view of spraying, the best location for the overspray intake is commonly held to be in the lengthwise centre of the booth to give balanced extraction air flow along the booth and so even air flow across the openings which are provided for the spray devices. When the overspray intake is provided at one end of the booth, attempts have therefore been made to modify the booth cross-section to produce the desirable air flow balance. In one known system the booth floor has side portions which slope downwards and the region therebetween is vertically offset to define a trough between the sloped side portions. A triangular insert is positioned in the trough during spraying. The combination of the sloped side portions and triangular insert helps balance the air flows along the length of the booth. However difficulties arise when the powder colour is to be changed as the triangular insert has to be removed for cleaning which adds to the cleaning time.

[0009] In another arrangement, shown, for example, in U.S. Patent 4715314, the booth floor is formed with a slot which extends the length thereof and connects to a duct also running the length of the booth. However the slot has poor access and accumulates powder when one colour is sprayed for a long period of time. It therefore makes cleaning more difficult and powder of one colour can be trapped therein and only recovered after a colour change with the result that it adulterates the recovered powder of the new colour and renders it unusable.

[0010] It is also been proposed to reduce cleaning time by preventing powder from ever depositing on the floor of a spray booth. German Patent 3408014 describes a system where the floor of the booth is formed as a series of descending steps and air is blown across each step from the slot between it and the step thereabove. The aim is to provide an air stream across the width of the booth which will carry all powder falling towards the floor into the overspray intake and prevent the powder reaching the floor and depositing there. The step form of the booth floor however increases the overall complexity of the booth and this, and the fact that air has to be continuously supplied, makes the booth expensive.

[0011] It is an object of the present invention to pro-

vide a colour spray apparatus in which powder colour can be changed quickly and easily and which, moreover, is of relatively simple construction.

[0012] It is another object of the present invention to provide a powder coating system in which both air borne and deposited overspray can be recovered by a system involving a small number of relatively simple parts which are themselves readily cleaned.

[0013] It is a further object of the present invention to provide a powder spray booth in which the collection of deposited overspray is facilitated whilst still balancing the extraction air flow along the length of the booth.

[0014] In one aspect the present invention provides a powder coating system comprising a powder spray booth having a floor, side walls and end walls, one or more powder spray devices positioned with respect to the side walls to spray articles passed through the booth via openings in the end walls, a powder recovery system having an overspray intake communicating with the interior of the booth, the powder recovery system including suction means for drawing overspray powder from the booth interior via the overspray intake, and, a diverter plate held within the booth generally parallel to but spaced from the booth floor to define therebetween a duct extending along at least a portion of the length of the booth and in communication with the overspray intake, the diverter plate including at least one aperture for the passage of overspray powder deposited thereon to the duct.

[0015] It has been found that with this apparatus it is possible to even out air extraction to give balanced air flow in the booth whilst still providing an arrangement which is easy to clean particularly if, as is preferred, the diverter plate is movable to a second position against a wall of the booth. The provision of at least one aperture allows overspray powder deposited on the diverter plate to be drawn therethrough and into the powder recovery system.

[0016] The overspray intake may be provided at or near one end of the booth with the diverter plate extending from that end along part of the length of the booth. In a booth provided with a plurality of automatic powder spray devices and having slots in the side walls for the automatic powder spray devices, the length of the diverter plate may be the distance between the end and the gun slot furthest from the end plus an offset. The offset can be comparatively small, a suitable value for a common booth design being 200 mm.

[0017] It has been found that it is only necessary to provide the diverter plate in the part of the booth where automatic guns are employed as this is where the electrostatic charges are highest and hence too the danger of explosion. In regions of the booth where manual guns are employed, it is not necessary to provide the diverter plate. However with common booth designs the length of the diverter plate is still sufficient to achieve the desired air balancing effect.

[0018] In a booth of the design shown in European

Patent Application No. 98940476.9 with an overspray intake at each end, a diverter plate may be provided extending from each end. It has been found that a booth with air intakes at both ends in fact produces the best balancing of the air flow in the booth and actually results in a "dead" zone in the middle of the booth where powder coating is particularly efficient. The plates can be arranged to extend to either side of this "dead" zone.

[0019] The or each diverter plate is suitably provided with a plurality of apertures arranged in a pattern. The pattern may be triangular with the apex being at the booth end. This pattern has been found to give the best combination of powder collection and air balancing. The total hole volume gradually increases from the end towards the middle of the booth.

[0020] The holes in a preferred form are elongate in the lengthwise direction of the booth to give maximum circumference for given cross sectional area and therefore maximum ability to draw deposited overspray from the upper surface of the diverter plate.

[0021] In one particularly preferred embodiment, the booth floor has two downwardly sloping side portions and the region therebetween is offset downwardly to define a trough between the side portions. The diverter plate is mounted between the bottom edges of the side portions such as to close part of the trough and form the duct. The diverter panel may define a slot between it and each of the side portions.

[0022] The configuration is not only compact but also easily cleaned. Deposited overspray powder on the slope portions will trickle down towards the diverter plate and then be extracted by the air flow to the powder recovery system via the slots between the plate and the side portions. As already noted deposited overspray powder on the surface of the plate itself will be extracted via the apertures. As a consequence the amount of deposited overspray powder in the booth at the start of the cleaning operation will be reduced so reducing the scale of the cleaning operation and consequently its duration.

[0023] In accordance with another aspect, the present invention provides a powder coating system comprising a powder spray booth having a floor, side walls and end walls, one or more powder spray devices positioned with respect to the side walls to spray articles passed through the booth via openings in the end walls, and a powder recovery system having an overspray intake communicating with the interior of the booth, the powder recovery system including suction means for drawing overspray powder from the booth interior via the overspray intake, wherein at least a portion of the booth floor is sloped and wherein cleaning air supply means is provided for directing air down the sloped portion(s).

[0024] Whilst it has been known to make at least a portion of booth floors sloping, the intended result of this, that deposited overspray powder will eventually trickle down the sloped portion, does not always occur. There can be significant build ups of deposited overspray powder on the sloped portion or portions which

adds to cleaning time and also gives rise to danger of explosions. By providing a cleaning air supply which directs air over the sloped portion or portions, downward movement of deposited overspray powder is ensured to bring the deposited overspray powder to a region where it can be easily cleaned, either manually or automatically by a mechanical scraper or the like and/or extraction in the exhaust air of the powder recovery system.

[0025] The cleaning air supply means may comprise a source of air and at least one plenum with plural air outlets extending along at least part of the sloped portion and located at the upper edge of the sloped portion.

[0026] Very preferably the air source provides periodically pulses of air to the air outlets. It has been found that it is unnecessary to constantly direct air across the slope portion or portions and it suffices just to pulse the air to start movement of deposited overspray powder down the sloped portion or portions. It is currently believed that the best effects are achieved when the cleaning air supply means directs the air at an angle of 1-3° to the sloped portion or portions.

[0027] In the particularly preferred configuration of the first aspect, the cleaning air supply means of the second aspect may direct air down the side portions along the length of the diverter panel.

[0028] In accordance with a third aspect, the present invention provides a powder spray system having a floor, side walls and end walls, one or more powder spray devices positioned with respect to the side walls to spray articles passed through the booth via openings in the end walls, and a powder recovery system having an overspray intake communicating with the interior of the booth, the powder recovery system including suction means for drawing overspray powder from the booth interior via the overspray intake, wherein cleaning air supply means is provided comprising a source of air and at least one plenum with plural air outlets, the air source providing pulses of air to the air outlets and the plenum being arranged to direct the air pulses over an internal surface of the booth on which overspray powder is deposited.

[0029] It has been found that pulses of air may be effective for collection of deposited powder across any internal surface of the booth not just sloped surfaces. The pulses of air cause the deposited overspray powder to collect, either by falling in the case of the ceiling or walls, or by movement along or across the booth in the case of the floor and so facilitate extraction of the deposited overspray powder by the powder recovery system. Good results are achieved without the need for a constant air flow or a complicated structure for directing the air. Thus the system is very economical both as regards manufacture and operation.

[0030] The air source may be a compressed air source, one or more fans or an air supply of the powder recovery system. The former has the advantage of cheapness whilst the latter makes for compactness and quietness since fans are relatively noisy.

[0031] Very preferably the first aspect is combined with the second and/or third which results overall in a very significant reduction in cleaning time but coupled with even air distribution across the booth and so good powder containment.

[0032] The invention also provides in a fourth aspect a method of operating a powder coating system including a powder spray booth having a floor, side walls and end walls, one or more powder spray devices and a powder recovery system with an overspray inlet communicating with the interior of the booth, the method comprising periodically directing jets of air across an internal surface of the booth to collect deposited overspray powder thereon.

[0033] The method thus involves providing air assist in the booth which facilitates collection and removal of deposited overspray powder.

[0034] The internal surface may be the floor and/or one or more walls and/or the ceiling of the booth.

[0035] The jets of air are preferably directed sideways across the surface, or lengthwise along the booth. In this way the powder is gathered together and easily collected by a cleaning operation along the booth which may be either manual or automatic.

[0036] It has been found that good results are achieved when the air jets are pulsed on for five seconds for every five minutes of spraying of articles in the booth. This prevents any significant build-up of deposited overspray powder by causing removal of the majority of deposited overspray from the booth with the result that the inventory of powder moving around in the system, particularly the quantity within the booth itself, is kept to a minimum.

[0037] Alternatively or additionally the jets of air can be pulsed just prior to a colour change so that the amount of deposited powder which has to be removed during the cleaning operation is minimised.

[0038] Very preferably this fourth aspect is combined with the second aspect and the air jets are directed across at least part of a sloping portion of the booth floor. For effective movement of deposited overspray powder on the sloping portion(s), the air jets are directed at an angle of between 1-3° thereto.

[0039] The invention will now be further described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a perspective view partly cut away of a powder booth forming part of a powder coating system in accordance with the invention;

Figure 2 is a perspective view partly cut away of part of a powder spray booth forming part of a powder coating system in accordance with the invention;

Figure 3 is a sectional detail of part of the booth of Figure 2;

Figures 4 and 5 are plan views of a diverter plate for use in the spray booth of Figures 1 and 2;

Figure 6 is an end view of the diverter plate of Figures 4 and 5;

Figure 7 is a schematic view of an alternative powder spray booth with a powder recovery system, and,

Figure 8 is a schematic view of a still further alternative powder spray booth.

[0040] Figures 1 and 2 show a powder spray booth 2 with side walls 4, end walls 6 and a floor 10. The booth 2 further has a conveyor (not shown) from which objects are suspended and conveyed through the booth 2 via openings 12 in the end walls 6 for coating with powder by a number of spray devices (also not shown). The booth 2 shown in the Figures has a slot 14 for an automatic spray device and an opening 16 to allow use of a manually operated spray device in each side wall. However it will be appreciated that the number and position of spray devices can be varied depending on the objects to be coated.

[0041] The ceiling, walls 4, 6 and floor 10 of the booth 2 are preferably made from a non-conducting material such as plastic. The powder sprayed by the spray devices if electrostatically charged will have a reduced tendency to adhere to the ceiling and walls 4, 6 since it will not be electrostatically attracted to the walls 4, 6 and ceiling 10 and instead will fall under gravity and collect on the floor 10 of the booth 2. For durability the floor 10 or at least the part or parts on which an operator will walk may instead be made of stainless steel.

[0042] The booth 2 will be provided with a powder recovery system which may include filters and/or one or more cyclone separators. Whatever form the powder recovery system takes, there will be an overspray intake communicating with the interior of the booth 2 and providing a current of exhaust air within the booth and into the overspray intake. The current of exhaust air will serve to extract airborne overspray powder. The skilled man can readily choose a suitable powder recovery system from those known in the art.

[0043] As powder spray booths are preferably cleaned from one end to the other, for the purposes of cleaning the overspray intake is preferably located at one end of the booth. In the booth depicted in Figures 1 and 2, the overspray intake is shown in dotted outline at 18 and is located at one corner of the booth. Rising thereabove is a duct 20 which leads to the powder recovery system which is preferably a powder recovery system of the type styled "close coupled cyclone" as described in European Patent Application No. 94929600.8.

[0044] The floor 10 of the booth 2 shown in Figures 1 and 2 includes two sloping portions 22 on either side

thereof, the sloping portions 22 being spaced and the remainder of the floor 10 being offset therefrom to define a trough 24 between the sloping portions 22. The wall of the trough 24 is cut away at the end of the booth 2 where the overspray intake 18 is located to provide a connection between the overspray intake 18 and the trough 24 and hence the rest of the interior of the booth 2.

[0045] A diverter plate 26 is positioned in the trough 24 at the end where the overspray intake 18 is located and extends from that end. The length of the diverter plate 26 is equal to the distance between the end of the booth 2 to the centre line of the automatic spray device slot 14 which is furthest from that end plus an offset. The offset may suitably be of the order of 200 mm. The plate 26 is suitably spaced from the side portions 22 to define a slot 27 therebetween.

[0046] The plate 26 has a pattern of holes 28 therein. Two possible patterns are shown in Figures 4 and 5. Both are triangular with the apex being at the end of the booth 2 where the overspray intake 18 is located. The holes 28 are elongate in the lengthwise direction of the plate 26 and hence the booth 2. As illustrated in Figure 6 the plate 26 has an upper surface 29 which is slightly peaked for strength and stiffness.

[0047] The diverter plate 26 supported by tabs 29 in the position shown in Figures 1 and 2 but is mounted via hinges 30 to allow it to be pivoted up and against the end wall 6. The duct 20 above the side walls 22 is separated from the interior of the booth 2 by two doors 32 each of which is also connected by hinges 34 so that the doors 32 can also be pivoted away against the end wall 6 so allowing access to the interior of the duct 20.

[0048] The booth 2 shown in Figure 2 differs from that of Figure 1 in that a plenum 35 is provided at the upper edge of each of the side portions 22. The plenum 35 on the left-hand of the booth in the sense of the Figures is shown in greater detail in the sectional view of Figure 3. The plenum 35 comprises a tube mounted within the wall 4 and formed with spaced outlets 36 along the length thereof. The plenum 35 is connected to a source of pressurised air, via a valve shown schematically at 37 and 38, respectively in Figure 2. Air from the source 37 is directed out of the air outlets 36 as jets across the side portions 22. The air outlets 36 may be arranged to direct the air jets at an angle of 1-3° to the side portions 22. Therefore if the angle (a) of the side portions 22 to the horizontal is 37°, the air outlets 36 will direct air at 38-40° to the horizontal. The valve allows the air supply to the plenum 35 to be pulsed.

[0049] The plenum 35 may be a PVC extrusion bonded to the inner panel 40 of wall 4. Alternatively it could be attached externally of the wall 4 and take on other form.

[0050] In use the booth 2 is employed to spray powder on to objects passing therethrough either from automatic guns extending through the slots 14 and/or by manual guns directed through the openings 16. Air borne over-

spray powder is extracted from the interior of the booth 2 on the current of exhaust air produced by the powder recovery system via the overspray extract 18 and duct 20. Overspray powder which comes out of the transport air provided by the powder recovery system will be deposited on the floor 10 of the booth 2 and so on the side portions 22, the bottom of the trough 24 and the plate 26. The flow of exhaust air caused by the air recovery module along the trough 24 will tend to draw deposited overspray powder on the upper surface of the diverter plate 26 down into the trough 24 therebelow either through the holes 28 or the slots 27 between the side portions 22 and the diverter plate 26. It has been found that the elongate shape of the holes 28 maximises the area therearound from which deposited overspray powder is drawn into the holes 28 and thence to the overspray intake 18 on the current of exhaust air. The peaking of the upper surface 29 of the plate 26 assists the passage of deposited overspray powder not drawn through the holes 28 into the slots 27 and so again to the overspray intake 18.

[0051] Deposited overspray powder on the side portions 22 will to an extent naturally trickle down the side portions due to their sloping and into the trough 24 and so the current of exhaust air produced by the powder recovery system. The booth 2 of Figure 2 however provides an air assist to this process through the plenums 35. The jets of air produced from the air outlets 36 of the plenums 35 increase the movement of the deposited overspray powder down the side portions 22. With short runs between colour changes, an air pulse may be provided just prior to the colour change. With longer runs, an air pulse is provided periodically to prevent deposited overspray powder build-up and so reduce the inventory of powder within the system, particularly the amount of powder in the booth 2. Whilst the air assist could be provided constantly, it has been found that in fact suffices to provide periodic pulses of air to set in motion the deposited overspray powder on the side portions 22. In one successful experiment, a pulse of five seconds every five minutes served to keep the side portions 22 reasonably clear of deposited overspray powder.

[0052] The air assist provided by the plenums 35 not only helps keep the side portions 22 clear but also increases the collection of deposited overspray powder on the upper surface from the diverter plate 26.

[0053] The great majority of deposited overspray powder which is collected off the side portions 22 and the diverter plate 26 is re-entrained in the exhaust air flow of the powder recovery system and so extracted as, in effect, air borne overspray powder from the booth 2.

[0054] The diverter panel 26 could extend the full length of the booth 2. However it has been found that it suffices for it to extend just past the slots 14 for automatic guns by an offset which, as noted above, can be in the order of 200 mm. This is because the amount of overspray produced by the automatic guns is generally

greater as too is the electrostatic charge build-up in the area of the booth 2 where the automatic guns are provided. In consequence the danger of explosion is higher in this area and so it is there that deposited overspray powder extraction needs to be concentrated.

[0055] The diverter plate 26 functions to even out air distribution along the booth 2 to give an air balance in the powder booth which leads to good powder containment. Thus it serves to reduce the amount of deposited overspray powder and so increase the amount of air borne overspray powder. This balancing effect is achieved in part by the pattern of holes 28. The size, number and pattern of the holes determines the air velocity through the overspray intake 18. As an example, the diverter plate 26 may be arranged so that in combination with the input air velocity of the powder recovery system and the cubic feet per meter rating of the booth 2, the air velocity through the overspray intake 18 is 2000 ft/min.

[0056] The booth 2 shown in Figures 1 and 2 has a single diverter plate 26 which is used in conjunction with the single overspray intake 18. However in a booth with two overspray intakes such as that shown in European Patent Application No. 98940476.9, a diverter plate 26 could be provided at both ends extending towards the middle of the booth 2. The diverter plates 26 would preferably stop short of the "dead" zone which it has been found is created by the provision of two overspray intakes, one at each end of the booth.

[0057] During spraying, air is periodically supplied to the plenums 35 to produce air jets down the side portions 22 and so cause movement of deposited overspray powder thereon into the trough 24 and on to the diverter plate 26. The air jets will also assist in keeping the diverter plate 26 clean. In one working embodiment, the plenums 35 had 0.5 mm holes set at 15 mm facing and powder collection was achieved by blowing air for bar pressure for five seconds every five minutes. As will be appreciated, the air assist parameters given for any given booth will depend on the configuration on the booth, in particular the sloping of the side portions 22. The provision of air assist means that if desired the sloping can be reduced which makes it easier for operators to move around within the booth 2 and facilitate construction of the booth 2.

[0058] The air assist need not be used in conjunction with a diverter plate 26. Figures 7 and 8 illustrate arrangements in which air assist is employed simply in combination with a sloped floor portion. In the arrangement of Figure 7 nearly the whole of the floor 10 is sloped and the air assist is provided across the complete upper edge of the sloped floor 10. This Figure also serves to show schematically the withdrawal of air borne overspray powder via duct 20 and into a cyclone separator 42 of a powder recovery system.

[0059] Figure 8 shows a further alternative in which the floor 10 has a triangular cross-section and the air assist is provided at the apex thereof. As shown by the

arrows, the air assist moves deposited overspray powder down each side of the floor 10 to prevent build-up on the floor 10 and to collect the deposited overspray at the sides of the booth 2. The booth 2 may have side inlet ducts for receiving the collected overspray powder and directing it to the powder recovery system.

[0060] In still further alternatives, the air assist is provided across other non-sloped internal surfaces of the booth 2, for example, one or more of the walls or the ceiling. Air assist can also be provided to an advantage with a non-sloped floor. A particular embodiment which may have great utility is to provide air assist centrally of the booth disclosed in European Patent Application No. 98940476.9 such that the jets of air are directed towards the ends of the booth and thus to each of the overspray intakes provided at those ends. The air assist will facilitate collection of deposited overspray powder on the floor and movement thereof towards the overspray intakes for recovery by the powder recovery system.

[0061] In all these alternatives, the air assist may be continuous or pulsed. The latter has the advantage of economy due to reduced energy requirements for the air source and therefore cost savings.

[0062] With a long run between the colour powder changes, it is desirable that an air pulse be provided periodically, whilst with short runs, it can suffice to provide a pulse just prior to the colour change.

[0063] Reverting to Figures 1 and 2, the cleaning operation which is performed when the colour of the powder is to be changed will now be described. The powder spray devices are shut off and doors closed across the access openings 12 in the end wall 6. The diverter panel 26 is pivoted up against the adjacent end wall 6 as too are the doors 32 to the duct 20. An operator preferably using an air hose, begins at the opposite end of the booth 2 from the duct 20 and moves along the booth collecting the deposited overspray powder which remains therein from all floor surfaces and the surfaces of the diverter panel 26, the duct 20 and the overspray intake 18. These last two operations are simplified because of the hinged mounting of the diverter panel 26 and the doors 32 of the duct 20.

[0064] The amount of deposited overspray powder which has to be removed in this operation is much less than with known booths because a significant proportion of the deposited overspray powder will have already been removed due to the action of the diverter plate 26, sloped side portions 22 and the air assist. This has the additional benefits that the amount of recycling work to be done during the cleaning process is reduced so that the recycling capability which needs to be provided can be lower and/or less powder has to be thrown away because recycling has not been completed by the time that the cleaning process is over.

[0065] In tests it has been found possible to reduce booth cleaning time well below the current average of 15 minutes and it is conjectured that it may even be possible to clean in less than 10 minutes.

[0066] The improvements in colour change capability are achieved whilst at the same time improving the actual spraying performance of the booth since the diverter plate 26 acts to even out air distribution across the booth openings and so give good powder containment and increased chance of powder adherence to the objects being sprayed.

10 Claims

1. A powder coating system comprising a powder spray booth having a floor, side walls and end walls, one or more powder spray devices positioned with respect to the side walls to spray articles passed through the booth via openings in the end walls, a powder recovery system having an overspray intake communicating with the interior of the booth, the powder recovery system including suction means for drawing overspray powder from the booth interior via the overspray intake, and, a diverter plate held within the booth generally parallel to but spaced from the booth floor to define therebetween a duct extending along at least a portion of the length of the booth and in communication with the overspray intake, the diverter plate including at least one aperture for the passage of overspray powder deposited thereon to the duct.
2. A powder coating system comprising a powder spray booth having a floor, side walls and end walls, one or more powder spray devices positioned with respect to the side walls to spray articles passed through the booth via openings in the end walls, and a powder recovery system having an overspray intake communicating with the interior of the booth, the powder recovery system including suction means for drawing overspray powder from the booth interior via the overspray intake, wherein at least a portion of the booth floor is sloped and wherein cleaning air supply means is provided for directing air down the sloped portion(s).
3. A powder spray system comprising a powder spray booth having a floor, side walls and end walls, one or more powder spray devices positioned with respect to the side walls to spray articles passed through the booth via openings in the end walls, and a powder recovery system having an overspray intake communicating with the interior of the booth, the powder recovery system including suction means for drawing overspray powder from the booth interior via the overspray intake wherein cleaning air supply means is provided comprising a source of air and at least one plenum with plural air outlets, the air source providing pulses of air to the air outlets and the plenum being arranged to direct the air pulses over an internal surface of the booth

on which overspray powder is deposited.

4. A powder spray system as claimed in Claim 3 wherein the floor and/or one or more of the walls and/or a ceiling of the spray booth is provided with a plenum.
5. A powder coating system as claimed in any one of Claims 2 to 4 wherein the apparatus further comprises a diverter plate held within the booth generally parallel to but spaced from the booth floor to define therebetween a duct extending along at least a portion of the length of the booth and in communication with the overspray intake, the diverter plate including at least one aperture for the passage of overspray powder deposited thereon to the duct.
6. A powder coating system as claimed in either Claim 1 or Claim 5 wherein the overspray intake is provided at or near one or both ends of the booth and the diverter plate extends from the or each end along part of the length of the booth.
7. A powder coating system as claimed in Claim 6 wherein there are a plurality of automatic powder spray devices and the side walls include slots for the automatic powder spray devices and wherein the length of diverter plate is the distance between the end and the gun slot furthest from the end plus an offset.
8. A powder coating system as claimed in any one of Claims 1 or 5 to 7 wherein the diverter plate is provided with a plurality of apertures arranged in a pattern.
9. A powder coating system as claimed in Claim 8 when dependent on either Claim 5 or Claim 6 wherein the pattern is triangular, the apex being at the booth end.
10. A powder coating system as claimed in either Claim 8 or Claim 9 wherein the apertures are elongate in the lengthwise direction of the booth.
11. A powder coating system as claimed in any one of Claims 1 or 5 to 10 wherein the diverter plate is mounted to be movable between the position parallel to the floor and a second position against one of the walls.
12. A powder coating system as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 5 or 11 wherein the booth floor has two downwardly sloping side portions and the region therebetween is offset downwardly to define a trough between the side portions and wherein the diverter panel is mounted between the bottom edges of the side portions such as to close part of the

trough and form the duct and to define a slot between it and each of the side portions.

13. A powder coating system as claimed in Claim 12 as dependent on Claim 5 or any one of Claims 6 to 11 when dependent on Claim 5 wherein the cleaning air supply means directs air down the side portions along the length of the diverter panel.
14. A powder coating system as claimed in any one of Claim 2 or Claims 5 to 13 when dependent on Claim 2 wherein the cleaning air supply means comprises a source of air and at least one plenum with plural air outlets extending along at least part of the sloped portion and located at the upper edge of the sloped portion.
15. A powder coating system as claimed in Claim 14 wherein the outlets directs the air at an angle of 1-3° to the sloped portion.
16. A powder coating system as claimed in either Claim 14 or Claim 15 wherein the air source provides periodic pulses of air to the air outlets.
17. A powder coating system as claimed in any one of Claims 3, 4 or 14 to 16 wherein the air source is a compressed air source, one or more fans or an air supply of the powder recovery system.
18. A method of operating a powder coating system including a powder spray booth having a floor, side walls and end walls, one or more powder spray devices and a powder recovery system with an overspray inlet communicating with the interior of the booth, the method comprising periodically directing jets of air across an internal surface of the booth to collect deposited overspray powder thereon.
19. A method as claimed in Claim 18 wherein the jets of air are directed either sideways across the booth internal surface or lengthwise along the booth.
20. A method as claimed in either Claim 18 or Claim 19 wherein at least a portion of the booth floor is sloped and wherein the air jets are directed across at least part of the sloping portion(s).
21. A method as claimed in Claim 20 wherein the air jets are directed at an angle of between 1-3° to the sloping portions.
22. A method as claimed in any one of Claims 18 to 21 wherein the air jets are pulsed on for five seconds every five minutes of spraying of articles in the booth.
23. A method as claimed in any one of Claims 18 to 22

wherein the air jets are pulsed on just prior to a change of powder colour.

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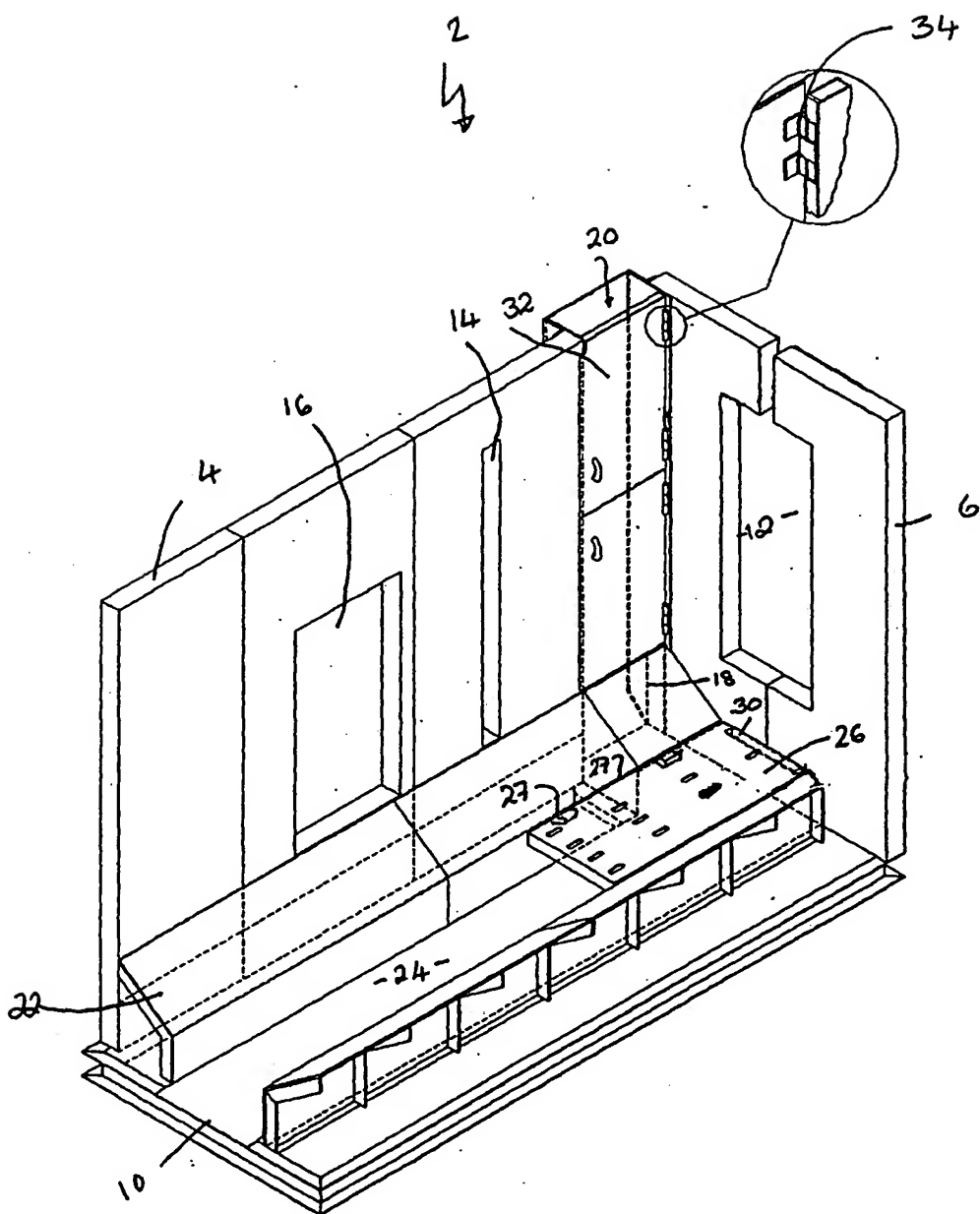


Figure 1

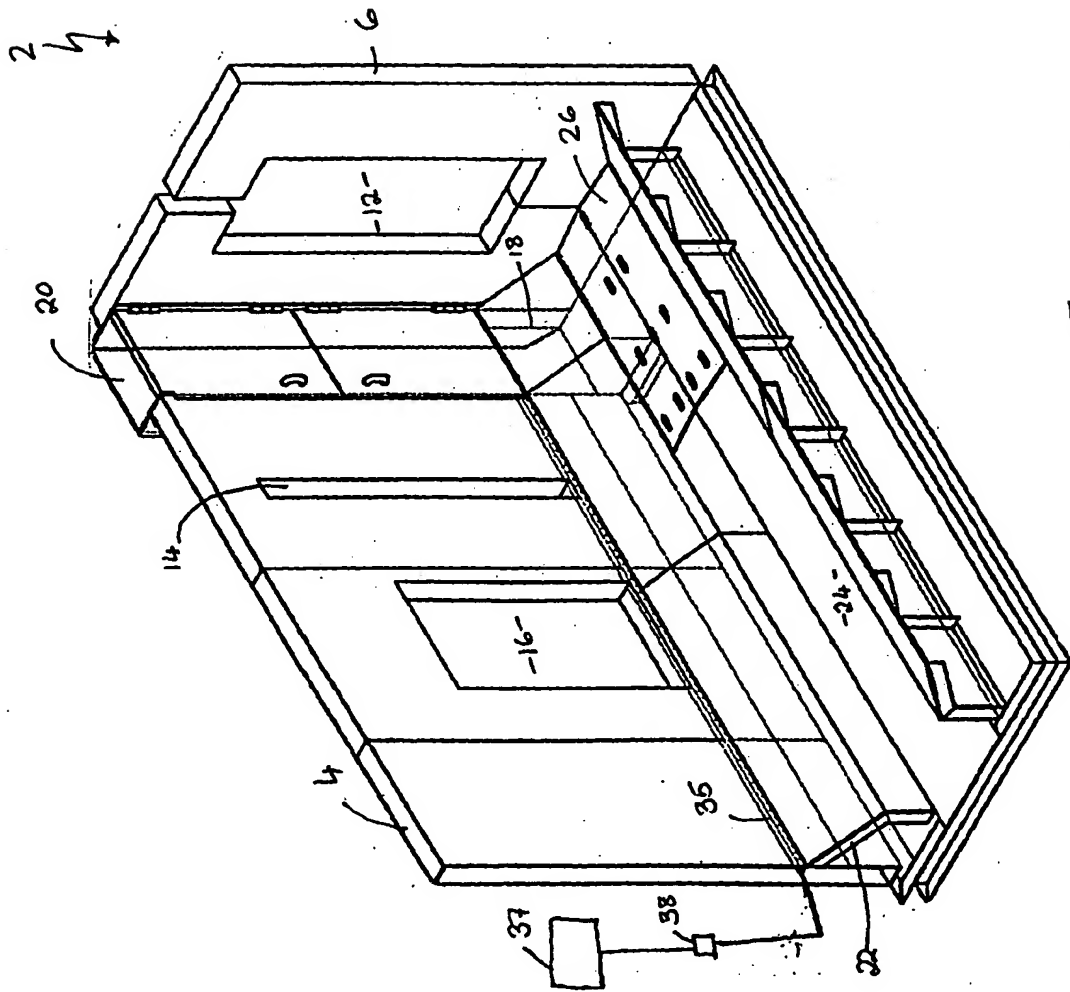
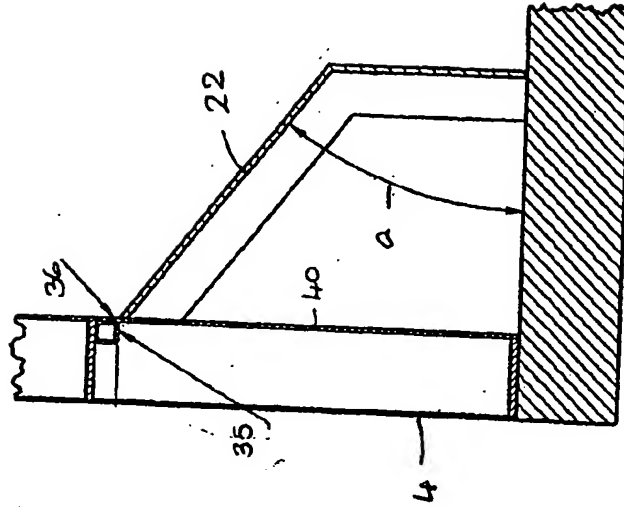


Figure 2



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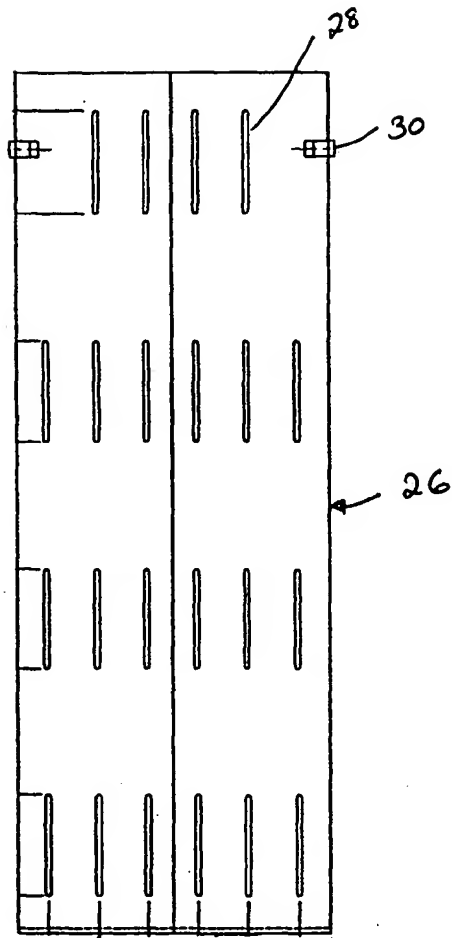


Figure 4



Figure 6

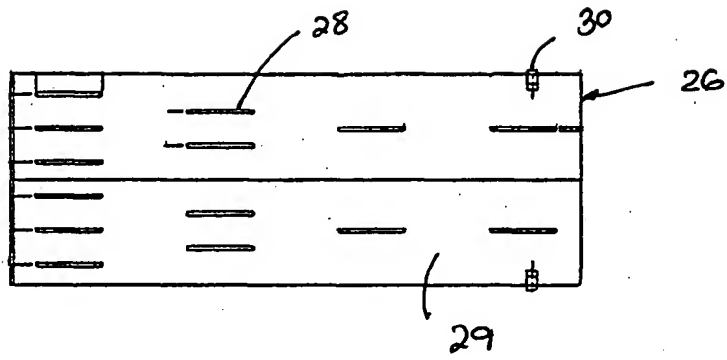
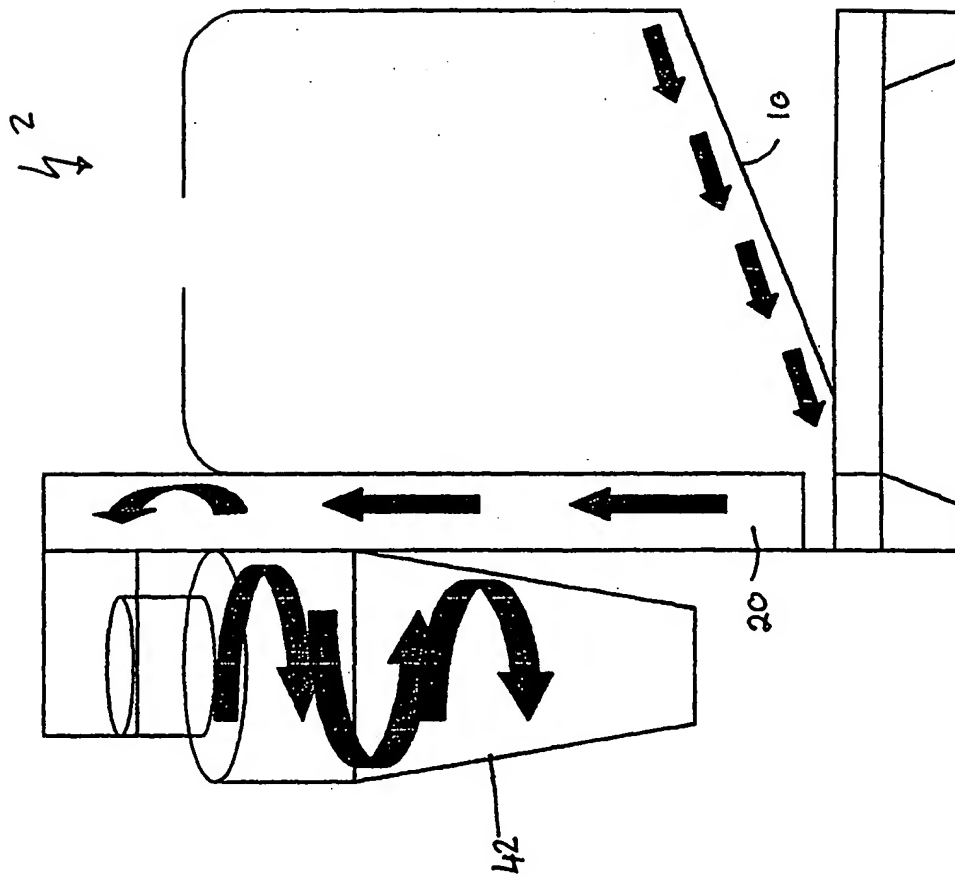
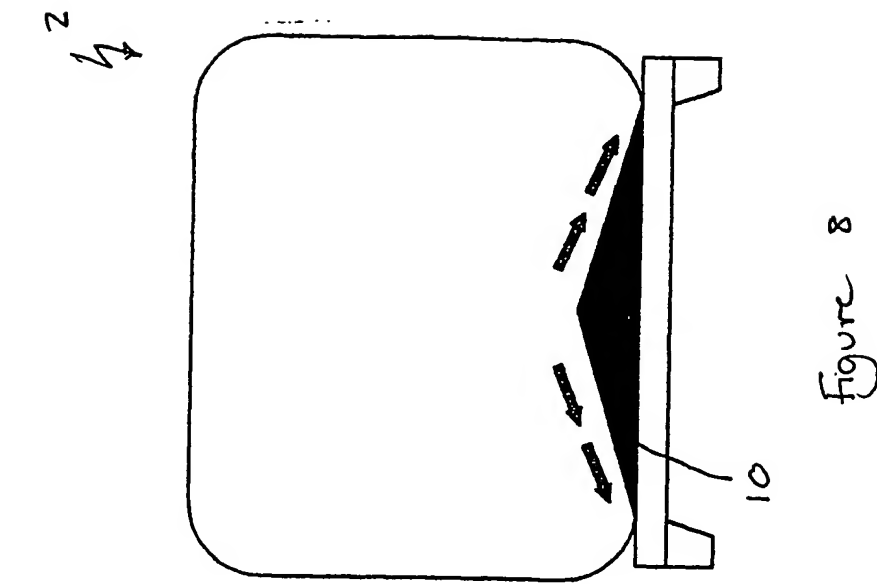


Figure 5





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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 00 30 2737

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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 11 August 2000	Examiner Jelercic, D
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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